

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

EMERGENCY POWERS COMMITTEE : 28 SEPTEMBER 2000

MODERNISING GOVERNMENT FUND : FINAL BID

Report by Chief Executive

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek approval to make a detailed bid to the Modernising Government Fund for support for an information and communications technology project that will link public services and government agencies as well as extending the locations through which information technology training and support is delivered to East Ayrshire residents.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 At its meeting on 15 May 2000, the council's Emergency Powers Committee agreed to submit an outline bid for support from the Modernising Government Fund to help create new information communication technology links between local and area offices, video conferencing support to government agencies and departments, and the creation of new learning, support and youth centres.
- 2.2 East Ayrshire Council was one of 104 public agencies that competed for support from the Scottish Executives new fund.
- 2.3 On 10 July, the Scottish Executive announced that the Council was one of 46 agencies who had been invited to proceed to the next round of bidding. Detailed feedback on the council's outline bid has been received from the Scottish Executive. This report outlines the changes that have been made to the council's outline project in light of this feedback and seeks approval to submit a final bid for support from the Fund.

3.0 THE MODERNISING GOVERNMENT FUND

- 3.1 The Modernising Government Fund was established to help take forward projects that were innovative and improved the delivery of public services. The Fund is intended to support pilot projects that can be replicated throughout Scotland to take forward the 21st Century Government objectives of seamless public service delivery.
- 3.2 The Modernising Government Fund (MGF) will contribute towards capital expenditure only, with a contribution of up to 75% of the capital costs. Bidders are, therefore expected to meet at least 25% of the capital cost for each project and any associated revenue costs from within their own resources.
- 3.4 The MGF fund contributions will be made in financial year 2000/01 and 2001/02.

4.0 FEEDBACK ON THE COUNCIL'S INITIAL BID

4.1 There were four strands to the council's outline project. These were:

- the installation of new information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure in 18 local and area offices;
- the provision of video conference links to government agencies and departments;
- the development of a user-friendly interface to link council and other services electronically with local residents; and
- the provision of support and training through 16 new centres targeted at those people who are currently excluded from, or at the risk of being excluded from, the information age.

4.2 Our bid, in common with all of those submitted, was subject to intense scrutiny by the Scottish Executive and assessment against a number of criteria. This exercise enabled the Scottish Executive to select those projects that should be invited to the second stage of bidding, but also generated detailed feedback that successful bidders would require to consider in preparing final bids.

4.3 A number of extremely helpful points were made to the council by the Scottish Executive and many detailed issues have now been taken forward by officers. The council was asked to expand on the partner involvement in our project, provide more detailed financial information including any revenue savings that the project may realise, conduct a full risk assessment, and provide information about how the project would be implemented, managed, and eventually evaluated.

4.4 However, when the Finance Minister announced the successful bids, he indicated that the fund had been oversubscribed and would not be able to support all of the projects that had been successful in this first stage if their funding models remained the same. The council was therefore invited to consider either increasing the amount of non-MGF contributions to the project or scaling down the project (or a combination of both) to reduce the call on the MGF fund.

5.0 HOW THE BID WAS REVISED

5.1 Over the course of the summer a number of detailed discussions have taken place with the council's partners and there has been a full assessment of the council's outline bid. This assessment, coupled with reflection on the detailed feedback provided by the Scottish Executive, has resulted in a proposal to revise the council's initial bid with a view to maximising the chance of success at the final assessment stage.

5.2 The main differences between the initial bid and the one that is now being proposed are outlined below:

- The council has achieved better than anticipated support from external public sector partners, including financial contributions to both the capital costs of the project and the ongoing revenue costs.
- We have secured private sector support from Microsoft Ltd.
- We have secured a commitment from a range of agencies, including health services and the Citizens Advice Bureau, to pilot the delivery of some of their services as part of the new project.
- While maximising the contribution from our partners, we have reduced the number of support and training centres envisaged within the project slightly to ensure that the project as a whole can be realised within the timescales and funding available.

6.0 FINAL BID OUTLINE

6.1 The overall objective of the council's project is to invest in improvements to the ICT infrastructure within the area so that the council and its partners can begin to provide services through an extensive network of public access locations. To empower as much of the community as possible to benefit from this new method of service delivery, new training and support centres will be provided where individuals and groups can develop the necessary skills to play a full part in the information society. The final element of the project is to begin the task of developing one single user-friendly interface that will allow any member of the public to get access to information from any public sector agency, irrespective of the different business systems used by these organisations and regardless of when and where the information is accessed from.

6.2 Stage One

6.2.1 The corporate network between local and area offices will be upgraded so that more information can be transmitted between different points on that network much quicker.

6.2.2 A high speed link will be extended between the council's corporate network and the Ayrshire Electronic Communities communications hub. This will link every point on the council's corporate network to everyone on the AEC network, which includes colleges and health services.

6.2.3 The Ayrshire and Arran Primary Care NHS Trust will invest in the security systems necessary to link their network to the council's corporate network through the AEC hub.

6.2.4 A link will be created between the Citizens Advice Bureau Headquarters in Kilmarnock to the corporate network.

- 6.2.5 Links will be made from the council's corporate network to the network of branch libraries.
- 6.2.6 The end result of the first stage project will be the establishment of a fast and reliable data and voice network between public sector agencies in East Ayrshire and beyond. This will be a major achievement for the area as it will deliver the type of network that is only readily available in large urban areas as a result of huge private sector investment.

6.3 Second Stage

- 6.3.1 The next stage of the project will be to use the network to provide information and services. Initially, a large range of partners will provide access to their information over the network. However, one of the most innovative aspects of our proposal is to provide direct video conference links between points on the network. This will allow, for example, a resident visiting a local office in Muirkirk to have direct video conference access to support from the Citizens Advice Bureau, Ayr or Kilmarnock colleges, or any council department or service.
- 6.3.2 The Primary Care NHS Trust would like to pilot the delivery of elements of its podiatry service over this new type of service provision. This will mean that people can 'self-refer' to the podiatry service from any point on the network. This could involve requesting information, filling in online surveys about their condition, receiving initial feedback, and making a direct appointment with the podiatry service. Currently, this can only be achieved by travelling to the central base for podiatry services.

6.4 Stage Three

- 6.4.1 While support from the Modernising Government Fund will allow us to make significant improvements in the information technology that is available to people, there has to be a corresponding investment in meeting the training needs of local people if they are to gain maximum benefit from this new method of service delivery. That's why the third stage of the council's bid is the creation of ten new learning and support centres and seven access and information points. The learning and support centres will range from drop-in centres providing full ICT training and support through to support centres that provide online access with support (rather than training), special training and support centres aimed at young people, and a range of public facing touch-screen points available in council and partner locations. The council has been successful in securing revenue support associated with these training and learning centres, and revenue support for the delivery of the overall project, from Ayr College and Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire.

6.5 Stage Four

- 6.5.1 Finally, the council and its partners want to look beyond what is achievable over the course of the next 18 months to realise a vision of access to public services and information at any time and anywhere.
- 6.5.2 Microsoft have now joined as one of the council's partners in this project because it is interested in developing a pilot that provides genuine seamless electronic

access to public sector information and services. The council and its partners have a range of different information systems and hardware. Even if we wanted to give the public direct access to these systems, the members of the public brave enough to try it would, require to be trained in every single operating system and interface developed by all of the agencies. Our aim is to provide a common interface that takes information from all of the systems and delivers it to the public in a common way. This interface is likely to be a web browser used commonly for the internet. The council and its partners recognise that there is a potential for phenomenal growth in access to the internet by mobile telephones and televisions in the future and the role of the personal computer in these systems will become diluted.

- 6.5.3 The bid meets the overall objectives of the Modernising Government Fund because it is innovative, it joins up council services with government services, health services and services provided through the voluntary and other sectors. The council's project also helps to raise the level of ICT skills in the area so that people are ready to take advantage of the full-scale delivery of public services electronically.
- 6.5.4 The bid also meets objectives of the Modernising Government Fund because it has secured involvement from a range of partner organisations, including the private sector.

7.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The total value of the project during the current and next financial years is £1,396,000. It is proposed that £658,000 is sought from the Modernising Government Fund, £156,000 is contributed by partners (including £70,000 revenue costs) and the council meets revenue costs of £168,000.
- 7.2 The council's capital contribution in financial year 2000/01 is estimated at £242,000, which has already been identified in the Capital Programme for the current financial year. The estimate of capital expenditure required by the council in financial year 2001/02 is £172,000. This is the amount currently included as an indicative amount in the three-year IT capital programme.
- 7.3 The revenue costs likely to fall on the council can be accommodated within existing budgets, as a result of savings that are projected as part of the bid.
- 7.4 It is anticipated that the council, and its partners will secure ongoing revenue savings as a result of the project by replacing existing expensive slow connections between points on the network with high speed permanent connections. In addition, there will be savings in telephony charges as more voice traffic can be accommodated on the high speed network. While it is unlikely that these savings will be secured in full until after the project is completely implemented, they could amount to approximately £150,000 per annum. These will be savings that will be available to fund the revenue costs of this project and further extend and improve the council's approach over time.

8.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The project is consistent with the council's core value of access. It will play a major part in delivering Social Inclusion across the whole of East Ayrshire and will help to close the digital divide that is emerging in society.

9.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 None arising directly from this report.

10.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 The Committee is asked to:-

- i note the Council's initial success in reaching the final bidding stage in the Modernising Government Fund;
- ii to agree to the submission of a revised bid for a project that will link public services and agencies within East Ayrshire as well as extending the range of information technology training and support available locally as detailed within the report;
- iii agree to note that the prior call on capital funds from the 2001/02 programme as detailed within this report should be remitted to the Policy and Resources Committee if the final bid is successful, and when the programme for 2001/02 is being finalised; and
- iv otherwise to note the contents of the report.

David Montgomery
Chief Executive

DC/SM

27 September 2000

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Report to Emergency Powers Committee: 15 May 2000, Modernising Government Fund.
2. Scottish Executive - Modernising Government Fund - Bidding Guidance, 3 April 2000.

AGENDA